

Understanding Allyship

NNPBC's offices are on the traditional and unceded territories of *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Skwxwú7mesh-ulh Temíxw* (Squamish), *Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh* (Tsleil-Waututh), and *Syilx* (Okanagan) Nations. NNPBC humbly acknowledges all the unceded and traditional territories that we live, work, learn, and play on for which we are eternally grateful.

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Background

NNPBC is committed to identifying mechanisms by which the nursing profession can confront, challenge, and change inequities experienced by Indigenous peoples in BC; inequities that arise from and are sustained by historical and ongoing colonialism and racism and their effects on health and social systems. NNPBC recognizes that Indigenous peoples and their communities who seek health care, those who are unable to or feel uncomfortable seeking health care, as well as Indigenous nurses and other professionals who work within health care are negatively affected by these inequities. NNPBC also recognizes that inequities harm us all, and therefore improving population health requires addressing those who are least well served. Further, when care is more equitable, just and fair, all members of society benefit.

NNPBC acknowledges that a first step toward improving health care outcomes for Indigenous people and creating lasting reconciliation in health care spaces is recognizing the truths that created these inequities. This is fundamental to advancing nursing practice in a meaningful way. Understanding allyship and anti-racism, what it means to be an ally, and how to respectfully acknowledge Indigenous peoples, their lands, and their rights, are necessary steps on the path toward structural change. When working towards true allyship, it is imperative to listen to Indigenous peoples, learn from what is shared, learn from what is not shared, and continuously challenge colonial assumptions and racism. This includes recognizing and challenging the biases surrounding nurses, including those operating within our organizations and cultures, in health care and beyond.

According to the Anti-Oppression Network, allyship is an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with people and groups marginalized by systems, structures, policies and practices.ⁱ This definition demonstrates that not only must allyship mean an ongoing commitment to anti-racism and equity, but also that our actions must align with the wishes of the group or community with whom we are trying act in solidarity.ⁱⁱ It is important and necessary to consistently acknowledge and work against the colonial-based societal ideas that affect us all. We need to take note of the behaviours, beliefs, and activities in ourselves and others that flow from these ideas, and consider how each of us has been impacted. For those of us who do not identify as Indigenous, seeking out opportunities to learn from Indigenous knowledge keepers so that we better understand Indigenous teachings and values on such matters as family, community, health, environment, education, land, and government is another step in developing allyship. By virtue of their professional status, nurses and nurse practitioners are in a position of privilege in our society and therefore all of us, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have an important opportunity to contribute to strategies that reduce the inherent oppression that remains a pervasive social determinant of health for so many.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) 2015 report, [*Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*](#), noted that a critical component of allyship is respect.ⁱⁱⁱ This must include respect for Indigenous peoples as well as a mutual respect among all Canadians, ensuring that everyone understands the history of colonization and how colonial policies, and their enactment by multiple actors, including nurses and other health providers, have affected and continue to negatively affect Indigenous peoples. The Commission stated that, with this foundational understanding in place, Canadians can finally begin to learn about allyship.

According to Dr. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond in the 2020 report [*In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in BC Health Care*](#), 'Anti-racism is the practice of identifying, challenging, preventing, eliminating and changing the values, structures, policies, programs, practices, profiles and behaviours that perpetuate racism.'^{iv} Active anti-racism work is integral to allyship.



Taking Action

The following is a list of actions that we can all take toward allyship. These actions are based upon and have been compiled from the Anti-Oppression Network, the TRC [Calls to Action](#), and *In Plain Sight*:

- Actively and openly acknowledge privilege and colonial power. Understand how this privilege has garnered and continues to sustain an inequitable system.
- Actively and openly recognize the traditional and unceded Indigenous lands and territories upon which each of us lives, works, and plays today. Understand that these territories have been inhabited by Indigenous peoples for many thousands of years prior to colonial contact and settlement. Understand the consequences of the appropriation of Indigenous lands and the confinement of Indigenous peoples to lands often too small or too poor in resources to support survival. Strive toward expressing your recognition for the land in a manner that is respectful (including sensitivity to terminology), authentic, and supports Indigenous sovereignty.
- Seek out opportunities to learn from Indigenous people, communities, and perspectives.
- Consider, explore, and seek out ways to better respect the natural environment in which you live. Recognize the leadership that Indigenous people demonstrate with respect to the land. Living in respectful relationship with the environment has always been fundamental to the health of Indigenous peoples, their cultures, communities, and beliefs, and they have much to teach the wider society about sustainability for us all. Consider the ways in which colonial activities have disregarded and continue to disregard the environment, and work to rectify this.
- Enact your own education around allyship. We are responsible for our own understanding on this journey toward reconciliation. Seek out educational resources to learn more.
- Allow yourself to feel uncomfortable. Pay attention to how you speak and behave, recognizing your mistakes and taking steps to address any inappropriate actions that come to your attention. For example, in an effort to pay respect to Indigenous peoples, there can be an unconscious ownership that comes with certain terminology, such as referring to Indigenous people in Canada as 'our Indigenous peoples.' Understand why this expression can be hurtful and take responsibility for making changes in your language use.
- Do not expect acknowledgement or reward for these changes. Human rights are a fundamental right for all. Indigenous peoples, and persons from groups that have been racialized and marginalized by mainstream society have dealt with inequities and mistreatment for generations.

NNPBC's Commitment

NNPBC unequivocally commits to working in ongoing allyship and to continually furthering its understanding as to how colonial power and privilege has perpetuated an inequitable social and political system. All of us at NNPBC, commit to ongoing learning and listening to one another. As nurses and nurse practitioners, we understand that some conversations are not easy; however, using our nursing lens we have the skills to think critically and challenge what clearly exist as imbalances in privilege and power. We recognize and reaffirm that it is our obligation as an organization to seek knowledge and continue to advocate for changes in society, such as equitable access to appropriate health care. NNPBC fully acknowledges that the current health care system in BC fails to meet the needs of Indigenous peoples. It has routinely prevented Indigenous people from accessing the care they seek, and in many instances caused harm because of the care they did or did not receive. As an organization representing the nurses of this province, we continue to work on policy and program development toward rectifying these injustices and thereby improving the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people.

Nurses and nurse practitioners are often the most frequent point of contact into the health care system for Indigenous persons and, especially in smaller communities, are sometimes the only health professional. As such, they play an integral role in ensuring that these collective nursing ideals are upheld. Working collaboratively with its members across all nursing designations, NNPBC will continue to advocate for the

expedient implementation of the recommendations and actions noted above and ensure that eliminating racism and reducing inequities for Indigenous peoples remains a priority on the political agenda of both nursing and government. As a profession, BC nursing commits to ongoing allyship, relying on the expertise of Indigenous nursing colleagues and consistently evaluating our work through the lens of recognizing privilege.

Key Messages

- NNPBC acknowledges the history of colonialism in BC and around the world, ongoing colonial policies and practices, and how colonial structures have adversely impacted and continue to impact Indigenous peoples across generations.
- NNPBC commits to first uncovering historic and contemporaneous truths that have led and continue to lead to and sustain today's health inequities.
- NNPBC commits to identifying mechanisms by which the nursing profession and the broader public can work to confront, challenge, and change systemic racism in the name of allyship.
- Allyship is a continuous commitment to 'unlearning and re-evaluating' traditional systems whereby persons in positions of privilege, including nurses and other health professionals, seek to support and operate in solidarity with groups or communities disadvantaged by the ways systems and organizations are structured, and by accompanying policies and practices.
- Acting towards allyship is a necessary step to take in order to begin to meet the recommendations of the *Truth & Reconciliation Report* as well as the *In Plain Sight Report*.
- As the professional association, NNPBC commits to ongoing work against systemic racism, concrete action against colonialism and oppression, and will ensure that allyship is a consistent and ongoing part of the work that is undertaken on behalf of BC's nurses.

Resources and Education

- [The Anti-Oppression Network](#)
- [NNPBC Commitment to Indigenous Health](#)
- [Upholding the Truth and Reconciliation Recommendations](#)
- [Resources and Supports for Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Reporting Racism in Health Care](#)
- [In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in BC Health Care](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#)
- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training](#)
- [Indigenous Cultural Safety Collaborative Learning](#)
- [Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association \(CINA\) Resources](#)

ⁱ Anti-Oppression Network and Peer Net BC, 'Allyship' n.d. <https://theantioppressionnetwork.com/allyship/>

ⁱⁱ Anti-Oppression Network and Peer Net BC, *Allyship*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 'Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future' (2015) 239. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-7-2015-eng.pdf

^{iv} Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, 'In Plain Sight' (2020) 7. <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/613/2020/11/In-Plain-Sight-Full-Report.pdf>